

Testimony of
Congressman Charles W. Stenholm
to the
House Committee on Agriculture
Subcommittee on Livestock, Dairy, and Poultry
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Congressman Charles W. Stenholm Ericksdahl, Texas

Chairman Boswell, Ranking Member Hayes, and Members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to testify here today on behalf of all animal agriculture. There is an old saying that there are two things you should not see being made: laws and sausages. This Committee has the job of making laws about sausages – laws that help animal agriculture in protecting animal welfare.

If you eat or wear clothes, you are affected by agriculture. The industry remains an important part of the United States economy, and according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), animal products account for the majority (51 percent) of the value of U.S. agricultural products, exceeding \$100 billion per year. As a farmer and rancher, I believe in the significance of the agriculture industry and in the value animal agriculture producers put on the safety and welfare of their livestock.

The Kentucky Derby was this past weekend, and I'm sure many of you watched it. With over 130 years of racing history at Churchill Downs, it is clear that the owners, trainers, and riders of the Derby care about the welfare of their animals. I'm sure many of you went to zoos as a child or will bring your children and grandchildren to one this summer. In fact, more people attend zoos every year than all sporting events combined, and the caregivers at zoos nationwide care about the welfare of their animals. Many of you probably remember the first time you saw the circus and may attend when it comes here. The Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Center for Elephant Conservation has one of the most successful breeding programs for endangered Asian elephants outside of Southeast Asia. They care about the welfare of their animals. Just like these groups of animal owners, production agriculture has not been given the credit it is due by animal "rights" activists, and we, too, care about the welfare of our animals. There is one thing that everyone agrees on: all animals should be treated humanely from birth to death.

Background

You will hear testimony today from several livestock producer associations, and they all care about the same thing: **ensuring the health and well-being of their animals is their number one priority.** The livestock industry has worked hard both from a legislative standpoint and through industry guidelines to improve animal welfare conditions. Animal agriculture constantly works to accept new technologies and science and apply them to the industry, investing millions of dollars every year to ensure the wellness of their livestock. Producers recognize the need to maintain animal welfare regulations for the safety and nutrition of their livestock, for the conservation of the environment, and for the profitability of their operations. But those regulations should be **based on sound science from veterinary professionals that best understand animals, working together with legitimate animal use industries.**

Many of the livestock groups have quality assurance programs in place. For example, the New Jersey Legislature and Department of Agriculture commissioned Rutgers in 2003 to perform a study on veal calf production, and experts at the land grant university concluded that the Veal Quality Assurance program and the principles behind it were scientifically sound. The poultry industry also continues to work on a united front to maintain a high level of oversight on animal welfare issues that ensures all employees practice the industry guidelines that were adopted. The animal agriculture industry continues to strive to improve animal health and welfare through scientific research, educational outreach, advocacy, legislation, and regulations.

Society of Untruths

While the livestock industry has a long history of supporting animal welfare, many activist groups such as PETA, the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), and Farm Sanctuary have used falsehoods and scare tactics to push their hidden agendas of fundraising and systematically abolishing all use of animals, including production agriculture, zoos, circuses, and sporting events. These groups campaign for animal “rights,” which is not synonymous with animal welfare, using half-truths or complete deception. For example, according to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), Farm Sanctuary charged veal farmers in New Jersey of malnutrition practices because of the absence of fiber in their calves’ diets. However, a coalition of dairy farmers, animal nutrition specialists, and dairy extension specialists at Rutgers University testified that it is typical to not give calves fiber because it is not healthy for a calf’s developing digestive system.

These groups also fail to mention the millions of dollars in fundraising and assets that drive their misguided goals. HSUS has accumulated \$113 million in assets; has a budget three times the size of PETA’s; and according to the ActivistCash website, has more than enough funding to finance animal shelters in all fifty states, yet only operates one animal sanctuary, Black Beauty Ranch in Texas, which is at full capacity. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, two offshoots of HSUS spent \$3.4 million on Congressional elections and ballot initiatives, which is more than Exxon Mobil Corp. And there is an ongoing investigation by the Louisiana attorney general to determine if the \$30 million in HSUS fundraising during the Hurricane Katrina crisis has been handled appropriately.

These activist groups use the platform of animal “rights” to advocate for regulations so strict that they will put animal agriculture out of business (which is their real goal). A video recently circulated to Members of Congress and a video produced by HSUS make numerous false claims against the livestock industry. For example, the videos suggest that horses are inhumanely transported on double-decker trailers. However, a law exists that has banned the use of double-decker trailers for transporting horses on their way to slaughter, and if a horse does arrive on one of these trailers, the processing facilities will not accept it. In addition, numerous truck drivers invested in new trailers that comply with the law, and animal agriculture stepped up once again to improve animal welfare conditions.

Another example of the misleading rhetoric by animal “rights” activists involves the process of “captive bolt” euthanasia. The previously mentioned videos claim that captive bolt is not humane. However, the 2000 report of the AVMA’s Panel on Euthanasia specifically approves the use of captive bolt as a humane technique of euthanasia for horses. It is also an approved method of euthanasia for pork, cattle, and lamb. The captive bolt method meets specific humane requirements set forth by AVMA's Panel on Euthanasia, USDA and the HSUS Statement on Euthanasia because it results in instantaneous brain death, and it is generally agreed to be the **most humane** method of euthanasia for livestock.

Watching the end of life for any living creature is not a pleasant experience, even when performed in the most humane manner. However, these groups continue to use human emotion and sensationalism to pry on the public’s sensitivity in order to reach their goal of abolishing animal agriculture.

Protect America’s Farmers and Ranchers

Unfortunately, we all know mistakes happen and laws are broken. I will not try to convince you otherwise. But when these unfortunate incidents occur, appropriate actions should be taken. **We should not get in the habit of creating arbitrary, uninformed, and emotionally based regulations** on an industry whose livelihood depends on the health and well-being of its animals. We should not tie the hands of researchers and investors that continually seek improvements in animal welfare practices, and we should not tie the hands of producers who work night and day to ensure the quality of life of their livestock so they can provide this country and others with the most abundant, safest, and most affordable food supply in the world.

Professional experts such as the AVMA, AAEP, and USDA continue to have their expertise questioned by animal “rights” activists who line their own pockets with donations secured by exploiting and distorting the issues. These groups throw sensationalistic and often staged photos in the faces of those who do not understand it and ask them to give money to save the animals. But what they do **not** do is use their millions of dollars in fundraising to build animal shelters, provide research for new technologies and procedures or provide **truthful** information to consumers about the animal agriculture industry. Emotions run high, and with continued antics by activist groups the ultimate outcome will be devastating. If animal “rights” activist groups continue to be successful like we have seen in recent months with the closing of U.S. horse processing facilities, abandonment of animals will increase, animal welfare will decline, honest and legal businesses will close, America’s trade balance will worsen, jobs will disappear, family heritage and livelihood will be stolen, and the best interest in the welfare of animals will be lost.

As the Agriculture Committee, it is your job to keep science and best management practices at the forefront of your decisions when developing legislation. Emotional, feel good policy is not reasonable for the agriculture industry. As a Committee, you are tasked with providing the type of environment for your agriculture constituents that allows them to have a manageable, profitable, and healthy livestock industry.